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ANNA PAVORD. **2005. The Naming of Names.** (ISBN 1-59691-071-2; hbk.). Bloomsbury Publishing, 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010, U.S.A. (**Orders:** http://www.bloomsbury.com/). $45.00, 384 pp., illustrated, 8" × 9 5/8".

The natural world presents innumerable objects which humans have needed to categorize and name; animals, germs, stars, storms, rocks, and other huge kingdoms have eventually been broken down into types and grouped so that we could begin to understand them. *The Naming of Names* traces the search for order in the natural world. Such a process has taken many centuries, and we have gotten better at it with a scientific understanding of the world, but the impulse has been there for as long as we have been thinking about the things around us. Pavord, author of the *The Tulip* (2001), *Flower Power: the Meaning of Flowers in Art* (2003), and an expert gardener, details the history of plant taxonomy from the ancient Greeks to 17th-century British botanist John Ray. She reveals the history of plant classification and shows how the process was affected by intellectual, political and cultural thinking. The journey, traced here in detail for the first time, involves the culture of Islam, the first expeditions to the Indies and the first settlers in the New World.

In Athens, Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus was the first man ever to write a book about plants. How can we name, sort, and order them? He asked. The debate continues still, two thousand years later. *The Naming of Names* gives a compelling insight into a world full of intrigue and intensely competitive egos. She has gone back to the ancient Greeks, and shown how thinkers through the medieval ages and Renaissance tried to get a grasp on the disorderly plant kingdom, with eventual success even before the taxonomic standards laid down by Linnaeus which we still follow. It is the pre-Linnaean efforts that Pavord has chronicled. There is also a history of plant illustration within these pages. The eventual woodcuts did not have to be crude, with many reproduced here showing swirling masses of plants or delicate leaves in fine detail. The final engravings that become included in plant books could show enough useful detail to be excellent field guides, although for centuries authors relied on previous works of folklore.

Along with Theophrastus, Pavord's highest praise goes to Englishman John Ray, who in 1696 coined the term "botany." He provided six rules by which to categorize plants, not only the ones familiar to him in England, but the spectacular finds being brought from distant lands. Others had previously insisted on classifying plants by use, which was entirely artificial, or more helpfully by leaf or seed form, but it was Ray who put botany on its first real foundation by noting the distinction of seeds that sprout with one leaf or two (we still classify monocotyledon and dicotyledon). He knew he was part of an ongoing process, predicting that future botanists would look back and "our proudest discoveries will seem slight, obvious, almost worthless." He might have been right, but seen as a tribute to their efforts, *The Naming of Names* shows how these discoveries, achieved over the centuries by curious, devoted, and fallible plantsmen, have brought us to our current understandings. Pavord's book essentially ends with Ray, barely mentioning the recent advances that have been made with DNA testing; such tests have confirmed much of what was eventually realized as the evolutionary tree, but have upset other parts as well. It has been a long botanical trip, and Pavord's deep scholarship and inclusion of gorgeous illustrations make the journey enormous fun. The book is lavishly illustrated, with a third of the pages being taken up with illustrations (most in color) nicely keyed to the text.

In the best sections, she slows down to draw detailed portraits of researchers and describe how each contributed to the slowly evolving (and, until the late 1600s, unnamed) science of botany. The story makes for wonderful scholarship and tributes to the plantsmen who eventually made the jungle comprehensible. It would be an excellent choice for public libraries with a readership interested in the history of botany.—*Gary Jennings, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 509 Pecan Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-4068, U.S.A.*